

Impacts of Membership Appointment Package Delay at Hanford

LoAnn Ayers, Public at Large (pending appointment at time of writing)

I submitted my application materials in February 2021.

My interest in providing local perspectives was fueled by the following statement, from the membership application, “The EM SSAB (or Board) provides meaningful opportunity for collaborative dialogue among the diverse communities at the Department of Energy (DOE) Environmental Management (EM) clean-up sites.” As a member of this community for 35 years, and given the several professional hats that I wear, I was enthusiastic about the possibility of participating in the Hanford Advisory Board. I scheduled time to support my active engagement, reviewed the work plan, and began to track communications sent to me by the HAB.

Unfortunately, I have not yet received a communication regarding the status of that appointment—accepted or declined. The lack of timely communication creates the impression that local representation is not a priority and that DOE does not value the time of local professionals who would be committed to being engaged. Delayed processing frames expectations in a less than productive manner. It is an impediment to obtain members to adequately represent the community.

I hope this perspective will join those of other locals to spur DOE action to support the active engagement of local professionals on DOE advisory boards.

Dr. LoAnn Ayers,

- President and CEO, United Way of Benton & Franklin Counties
- Treasurer, Columbia Center Rotary, Kennewick
- Local business owner

Daniel Strom, Benton-Franklin Public Health

By inaction on approving appointments to the Hanford Advisory Board (HAB), the United States Department of Energy (DOE) has suspended the HAB. DOE makes a mockery of the HAB by removing its ability to have a quorum, eliminating all the HAB’s power to fulfill its mission. For example, the HAB cannot register advice about, and action on, the B-109 tank leak, a potentially urgent issue (<https://www.hanford.gov/page.cfm/HanfordTankB-109Overview>). The impacts of delayed appointments are that

- urgent issues are unresolved
- people’s time is wasted
- HAB members’ employers salaries are wasted (sometimes these are state or local tax dollars), and,
- worst of all, many volunteers are completely disrespected by being made irrelevant, even if only temporarily.

I am a relative newcomer to the HAB. My appointment decision was emailed in October 2020 from an unrecognized DOE e-mail address that my e-mail client put in my “Other” Inbox and thus remained unread until December 2020. Having been told that I would hear about my appointment in May or June of 2020, I decided that my appointment had been denied. Thus, I missed the September HAB meeting that I would have attended had I been a member (I wasn’t), and I missed the December HAB meeting because I had not been contacted in an effective way. I was surprised and pleased when I learned that I had been appointed, and was able to attend my first HAB meeting in March 2021. The impact of delayed appointments is that I missed the first 6 months of my first (so far only) term on the HAB.

If I were a foreign adversary of the United States, I would seek to make the US government dysfunctional everywhere I could. Well, DOE’s incompetence seems to play into the hands of that hypothetical foreign adversary by creating the HAB dysfunction through inaction.

DOE, please make government functional. Please act promptly (and always months before service begins) on appointments to advisory boards like the HAB. Let us accomplish those tasks that we are charged with doing. Have EM-1 appoint a chief of staff who will ensure that must-do responsibilities like appointing advisory boards under FACA are carried out.

[Tom Galioto, Tri-City Regional Development Council \(Public at Large at time of writing\)](#)

My input in response to the request below is as follows:

The delay in HAB membership appointment approval has negatively affected HAB performance by:

1. Preventing HAB review and approval of a formal piece of Advice on “Responding to Leaking High-Level Radioactive Waste Tanks” during the scheduled Sept 22, 2021 virtual full HAB Board meeting, thereby delaying issuance until after the next planned full HAB meeting after membership appointment approval has been received. This advice addresses a critical Hanford cleanup issue and one of high importance and concern to the local public.
2. Preventing HAB review and approval of the FY2022 HAB Work Plan during the scheduled Sept 22, 2021 virtual full HAB Board meeting, thereby delaying implementation of important HAB activities associated with Hanford cleanup until after the next planned full HAB meeting after membership appointment approval has been received.
3. Preventing approval of minutes from the previous June 9/10 full HAB meeting, and thus postponing this action for an extended period of time until the next planned full HAB meeting is held after membership appointment approval has been received. This delay in reviewing/approving the minutes by over 6 months negatively impacts the accuracy of the HAB activity record.
4. Delaying planned committee actions associated with Hanford cleanup and complicating communication between HAB members and DOE during virtual committee calls/meetings and the full HAB Board meeting in September and beyond. In these instances, HAB members awaiting re-appointment were required to have active HAB members ask questions

and provide comments for them, thus making communications difficult, confusing, and ineffective.

5. Preventing participation by anticipated new HAB members who are anxiously awaiting initial appointment, thus denying the expanded diversity of the Board and negatively affecting the newest Board members' enthusiasm and energy.
6. Requiring the HAB Facilitation Team to perform additional time-sensitive work in determining if required quorums of active HAB members were present during all virtual committee calls/meetings to conduct business, and in developing/issuing additional communication on required changes in normal HAB processes resulting from lack of HAB membership appointment approval.
7. Creating confusion and frustration within and between the HAB and local site DOE personnel resulting from changes necessary to normal interactions, and contributing to additional inefficiencies.

Gerry Pollet, Heart of America Northwest

Impacts of delays in HAB appointment:

- Made it impossible to provide timely advice on the number one current public concern over Hanford Clean-Up
- Prevented a meeting at which the Board might have adopted advice on strategic planning priorities
- Prevented board members awaiting appointments from being active participants in board committees and in development of advice for nine months, after recruitment specifically to participate in issue management of key advice topics (2020).
- Prevented organizational representation at board meetings from new appointee while second representative of the organization was unable to attend.
- In the past, these delays precluded appointment and service of graduate or undergraduate alternate while USDOE and Board say they want young people to participate (this is also precluded by eliminating option to have a second alternate participate).

Esteban Ortiz, Public at Large (pending appointment at time of writing)

Greetings,

To me is plain and simple a lack of disrespect for the community and individual serving on the board. Lack of professionalism by DOE and other parties involved: what would happen if one shows up late to work? If you do not turn in your assignment or project on time? We don't have to nuke it, no pun intended. I believe it has been mentioned that in 75 years this nuclear waste issue has not been resolved. Finally I do not understand the reason Hanford, Richland and Tri-Cities can not be the "greenest environment" in the country to attract younger diverse talent instead of saying I am not going to that city full of nuclear waste with no real solutions on clean up.

David Bowen, Washington State Department of Ecology

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

My personal thoughts are how valuable the HAB is to all three agencies - expertise, forum for public comment and outreach, connection to the various interests in the community, etc... Over the last few months I observed:

- Several HAB members expressing signs of being disenfranchised and not valued.
- Continuation of delays in processing packets adds to the feeling of a lack of respect for their time and expertise.
- Seven to eight months processing packets seems excessive.
- I understand a change in administration and additional review yet I'm told the review process was long the last several years not just 2021.

Comments based on our teams observations are included below:

- The delays in processing appointment packages have diminished the quality and quantity of engagement previously obtained.
- It may be necessary to consider other engagement opportunities that would require additional effort (and cost) from DOE.
- The HAB allows the Tri-Parties to engage with the public in a very focused way.
- The HAB members are well-educated on Hanford topics allowing for preparation of less introductory information, more efficient.
- The Tri-Parties may engage with other members of the public with more introductory material, while preparing less introductory material for the HAB.
- The HAB provides more focused and useful feedback than has been expected in other public meetings.

Rob Davis, City of Pasco

The Board and foundation of the Tri Party Agreement assumes "acting with noble intent". I doubt that DOE Headquarters gives a hoot about the Hanford cleanup. The consequence of the many months of delay, the status reports became excuses that started to contradict or even become a rumor. Headquarters shamed the local office, the current management has worked so hard to achieve progress. Do we really believe what DOE tells us? Trust is hard to maintain and this delay eroded trust.

Max Woods, Oregon Department of Energy

Thanks for soliciting our feedback and apologies for the delay. Below is the Oregon response:

- Several charter-backed interests have lacked any HAB representation for months. This resulted in a decision by the board not to vote on timely and important advice on tank leaks, as well as the annual work plan and calendar for the board, in order to preserve the ability for these long-standing interests to withhold consent from Board actions that would not represent

their interests and to preserve the concept of quorum as quorum of the board, not quorum of appointed members. Functionally, Board business ground to a halt.

- The Tank Waste Committee has lacked leadership with both the Chair and Vice-Chair in the “lapsed member” category. This affects the ability for the committee to set agendas, call a quorum for meetings to proceed, and provide overall direction to the committee.
- DOE, board leadership, and facilitation have had to juggle conversations including an undefined group of interested members-to-be; where they are unable to actively participate, but encouraged to attend and learn
- Any potential changes to the HAB’s MOU by the tri-party agencies have been delayed until HQ actually decides if five new public at large seats are added to the board, or whether the members will represent interests.
- Finally, the delay in membership approval has limited the opportunity for new members to participate in discussions, as well as to build relationships based on our interests. DOE has lost goodwill in the process.

Bob Suyama, Benton County

While the membership packets have recently been approved, I feel that it still important for the Board to provide input on the membership approval process. This membership approval situation routinely occurs every year and every year impacts the work of the Board until the packets are approved.

Some impacts directly resulting from the delay in US DOE approval of membership to the Hanford Advisory Board (Board) include:

- **The HAB cannot perform its function to provide Public Input to the Tri-party agencies as called out in the TPA:** One current example is of this situation is that US DOE has recently identified that another single shell storage tank that is leaking radioactive waste directly to the environment. US DOE’s position is to do nothing. Allowing the tank to continue to leak to the environment for at least 25 years, at which time the leaked waste will have contaminated the ground water to the point where it can start to be processed by the existing Pump and Treat system. The HAB role is to provide public input to this approach. Advice has been prepared and approved by the TWC committee. However, without a HAB quorum, no action or public input can be provided to the Tri-party agencies on this situation.
- **Work Plan and Board Calendar:** Every year the Tri-pray agencies and the HAB jointly develop a plan of the Issues and the areas where the HAB is to be knowledgeable and provide public input to assist the TPA agencies in the Site’s cleanup mission. A calendar of the dates where board and committee meetings is also developed. This year due to a lack of a quorum due to the membership packets not being approved, the board has no officially approved plan and established meeting dates for the current fiscal year.
- **Loss of Interest of Potential New Members:** The length of time that it has taken US DOE to approve the membership packets may resulted in a loss of interest of many of our existing and especially potential new members to serve on voluntary citizens advisory boards.

Emmitt Jackson, Non-Union, Non-Management Employees:

The voice (stakeholders) are silent and invisible. Its sort of like “The Emperor’s New Clothes”

Chris Sutton, Public at Large

I don't think the delay in HAB membership appointment approval has affected the Hanford cleanup one iota. Also, I don't think the delay has affected the people I represent (Public-at-Large). While it may impact HAB voting because of quorum issues, I don't think it has impacted much the business of the RAP or BCC.